



# DHS Matters!

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Skye, right, a former foster child, is among youths that rewarded their foster parents May 14 in Standish.

## **Arenac County recognizes foster parents in unique way**

*"Aging out" foster children step into bad situation, turn darkness to light*

From Kim Bejcek, Program Manager

Bay-Arenac DHS

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STANDISH—In recognition of Foster Parent Month, Arenac County DHS staff were preparing for the annual foster parent recognition event, scheduled for May 14 at the Pine River Golf Course. However, looming budget cuts and a series of executive directives quickly changed the momentum of this year's event. As workers and supervisors began canceling reservations, a wonderful group of young people came forward and offered to cater the event at no charge. This amazing group of individuals is the Bay-Arenac Youth Board under the guidance of Youth In Transition coordinator **Doug Lewis**. The youth board, a component of the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative, is comprised of youths ages 14-23 who are aging out of the foster care system.

When Doug mentioned the plight of Arenac's recognition dinner at a regular youth board meeting, the youths viewed the situation as an opportunity for them to give back to foster parents. They immediately put a plan into place, gathering several members of the youth board who were willing to spend a day purchasing, preparing and serving the dinner. They obtained donations for the cost of the food. Two of the youths, who were already working in the community as skilled cooks, put together a menu of baked

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## Arenac county recognizes foster parents

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chicken, mashed potatoes & gravy, soup, salad, and dessert. At the same time, **Bruce Mackie**, Bay-Arenac DHS PRIDE trainer and support group coordinator, located a church willing to donate their kitchen and dining room. Family to Family coordinator **Jennifer Shores** also assisted the crew. The dinner was held as planned on May 14, 2007.

Not only did the youths do a superb job hosting the dinner, but three of them read to the foster parents from a list of “10 things we appreciate about foster parents.” Arenac County DHS licensing worker, **Irene Kolarik**, remarked how quickly a bad situation could be turned around with such energy and spirit from the young people. She created a new theme – “making lemonade out of lemons” – for the new invitations. Staff members and foster parents had a great time and were very thankful for the generosity of the youth board members.

## Calhoun County CPS specialist cited for local award

From Ailene L. Buchtrup

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Calhoun County CPS specialist

**Lee Koteles** received an award April 26 during Victims' Rights Week in Calhoun County.

The awards are presented each year to individuals that show exemplary service to crime victims. Koteles, who has been with DHS for 30 years and worked in CPS the past 13 years, was one of two award recipients this year. The annual event and award is sponsored by the Victims Unit of the Prosecuting Attorney's office in Calhoun County.

“We do a noble job protecting children, and to work with so many others of like mind, really brings me great satisfaction,” Koteles said.

He is married to CPS specialist Kelly Koteles, with whom he shares his life and his passion for protecting kids and helping families.

With his experience and dedication, he has advice for other children's services workers: “They need to realize what they do is so vitally important; usually others aren't going to tell you that.

“You need to continually tell yourself that and believe it! The children we serve are counting on us to do the best we can for them.”



**Lee Koteles**, center, and Patricia McClure, the personal protection order coordinator with Calhoun County Circuit Court clerk's office, stand next to Calhoun County chief prosecuting attorney John Hallacy. Koteles and McClure received awards during Crime Victims Rights Week in Calhoun County. Koteles is a children's protective services specialist in Calhoun DHS.



## Oakland Children's District celebrated children April 26

Lynn Contreras, Community Resource Coordinator  
DHS-Oakland County, Bloomfield Hills

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Oakland County Children and Family Services' office hosted "Take Our Daughters and Sons to work Day" April 26. Twenty children, ranging in age from 6-18 years, participated in the event.

The children followed an ambitious agenda for the day starting with a continental breakfast and ended with each child awarded a certificate of participation and joining in a photo shoot with county deputy director **Ken Visser** and district manager **Dorothy Butler**. Activities in between included the children sharing their future aspirations, participating in a photo session with parent/mentor and attending some pretty interesting workshops. The workshops covered topics that every adult & child should know about, but especially important for these children whose parents and relatives are committed to protecting children from abuse and neglect every day on the job.



**Hailey Stewart, daughter of foster care specialist [Andrea Stewart](#), poses with CFS district manager Dorothy Butler and deputy director Ken Visser while visiting Oakland County Children's District April 26.**

The workshops conducted were "Preventing Child Abuse", "Proper Handling of a Baby", "Safe Sleep" and "Shaken Baby Syndrome". The sessions were conducted by employees representing the various areas of CFS. The trainer creatively shared information and/or provided demonstrations; e.g., proper handling of a baby and safe sleep, etc. The children engaged in Q & A and had some fun and games activities – all with an educational twist. At the end of the day, each child was given a goodie bag as their "take home pay" for a job well done!

### **Tough times don't last but tough people do!**

The Midland Youth Group for foster and adopted teens created the mural (right) and put it at the back entrance of the Department of Human Services office in Midland. "We came up with this idea to make foster kids feel more welcomed when they come for visits after they were put in foster care," the group said. "We came up with the idea of having handprints and a footprint to represent each one of us individually.

"The quote inside the sun, 'Tough times don't last, but tough people do,' we see representing us. We all had a really hard time adjusting into foster care but we always seemed to get by for better or worse. We hope that other children entering foster care will look at this mural and gain comfort in knowing that they to, will be OK!"

– from [Selene Wadhawan](#)



**Date:** May 31  
**To:** **Angela Cusmano, Foster Care Specialist**  
**Macomb County Mt. Clemens District, Clinton Township**  
**Subj:** Thank you

I wanted to take a moment to say thank you for all of the assistance, words of encouragement, and, most of all, (the) respect you gave me in the last two years. It seemed to come easily to you but it meant so much to a single mom trying to get through nursing school. You are truly a blessing and won't be forgotten. On May 4, 2007 I graduated (with honors) from St. Clair Community College with my associate's degree in nursing. I am looking forward to beginning a new chapter in my life. The respect and kindness you took the time to show me will be carried with me.

**Michelle Bettucci**

Chesterfield

■ *Angela Cusmano was a family independence specialist at the Mt. Clemens District when she had the author in her caseload. Cusmano's current supervisor, Katherine Larkins, submitted this letter for publication. "It is rare to find someone that will treat people with such kindness and respect when they are in a position of having to ask for help," Bettucci said about Cusmano. "It made a very difficult time easier."*

Your letters,  
intercepted  
and otherwise

**Date:** May 31  
**To:** **Bob Lewis, Acting Director**  
**Otsego and Crawford County DHS**  
**Subj:** **Bruce Bailey & Jody Schlaufman**

We were contacted during lunch by the Veterans' Clinic in Gaylord about a man in their office who had been physically abused. The alleged abuser was his wife who was also his transporter to the clinic today. I contacted Bruce Bailey at 1:03 P.M., explained the situation, and the APS worker, Jody Schlaufman, made face-to-face contact at 1:17 P.M. The wife was arrested and taken away in a squad car. Bruce's verbal report to me was followed by an e-mailed narrative by 2:21 P.M.

This was a fantastic response by Bruce and his staff. We will follow up from here but this could have been a very bad situation if Otsego DHS staff had not reacted so quickly and professionally. Had the wife left with the victim she may have suspected him of revealing the abuse and there may have been consequences for him. Excellent job by our partners in Otsego! Thank you.

**Doug McCombs**, Director

Alpena and Presque Isle County DHS

■ *Bruce Bailey is services supervisor and Jody Schlaufman is an Adult Protective Services specialist, both from Otsego County DHS in Gaylord.*

**Date:** May 14  
**To:** **R. David Young, Program Manager**  
**Saginaw County DHS, Saginaw**  
**Subj:** **Erlinda Martinez**

Recently, I was transferred to a new caseload and Ms. (Erlinda) Martinez was assigned as my worker. In the past I've never had a worker that took the time to educate me as a client on programs. Ms. Martinez explained the JET Program to me in such a way that it became reality and I understood it more; not to mention that I felt as if I was listening to a professor lecture. She has treated me with respect and talks to me as if she believes in my dreams and that she actually sees me accomplishing the goals that I have set for myself (to become self-sufficient by having established a career.)

In a different situation, I spoke with her concerning a question regarding my case. Somehow, without me voicing to her the "issues" between my children and myself, she invited me to attend a parenting class. This parenting class was exactly what I needed during this time because I felt alone and without help raising four children.

I want to commend her for doing such a wonderful job. I have never encountered a worker who takes time to educate her clients with information that's beneficial without being rude and giving watered down answers. I truly believe if there were more workers like Ms. Martinez less men and women would be dependent on state funds. The hand that's helping to feed and assist them would encourage them and guide them in a more positive way.

**Tiffany Goodman**

Saginaw

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